

Unusually Wet Weather Threatens Disaster In Short Grass Country

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MERTZON, Texas — Just as it appeared that our luck was improving, more rain fell in the Shortgrass Country last week. For about three days a miserable, steady soaker encompassed the entire area. As usual, the rain-worshipping citizens responded by tearing around their rain-gauge circuits as if the fate of ranchdom depended on their emptying activities.

In all principal outposts, the coffee houses were filled by hombres extolling the virtues of the follow-up rainfall. Though less than three percent of the native population had ever seen rain patterns come so close together, they expounded on the advantages of the new climate as if they were old hands at in living a wet country.

While these rain-drunk, desert creatures were chattering themselves hoarse, the first serious defects of the moisture were threatening the scene. A few of the more sober-minded individuals were already realizing that if the mud didn't lay, the country was headed for disaster. On our own outfit, the first hardships cropped up during the planning for the fall roundup. It seemed certain that if the same wandering shepherds who had signed up in the past were going to be on hand this season, the chances of finding them after making a drive were going to be similar to those of cold trailing a salamander across a half-filled lake bed.

To be clearer, we figured that without the telltale dust clouds which from the beginning of time have marked the paths of lost wranglers, it would be nearly impossible to sift these eternally disoriented drovers out of the mesquite thickets.

Besides the worry as to how to relocate the strays, there was the awesome dread of what the wet, cool wether was going to do to the appetites of these same parties. Granted, lambs and calves were strong to steady in price, but that didn't mean the increased margin would be sufficient to absorb a stepped-up attack on the grocery supply.

Feeding these sheep and cow scatterers has long been a serious problem without the climate to inspire over-performance at the dinner table. Before the rains came, their hosts were already wondering how high the consumption level would reach. Last week the management class was undergoing terrific stress, anticipating the day when it will cost more to refuel a cowhand than to get a jet airliner off the ground. There were no previous guidelines that would indicate the increase one could expect, once these free-wheeling herders became adjusted the different atmosphere.

I did uncover a case study of the open-style eating habits of visiting preachers and county agents. But as it turned out, these findings were of no value, since the experiments had been run exclusively on a dry track.

So today the problem remains:

If we hold the roundup on wet ground, under conditions free of heat or dust, then we are going to spend half our days seining the bushes for a portion of the work force. Then, it seems that once the lost souls are gathered, our night will be plagued with worry whether they are going to eat the boss out of land fixtures.

I don't know when my people will ever learn that every single rain isn't entirely a blessing from heaven. The safe money says they will continue to pay homage to the rain gods even if our homeland is turned into a rain forest full of cotton mouth snakes and eager screwworms.